The Bandafassi region of southeastern Senegal is, in many ways, a classic example of a shatter zone. It is a variegated cultural and physical landscape filled with half a dozen major ethnic groups scattered across a series of villages occupying riparian zones, broad flood plains, and laterite plateaus. Local oral histories attest to nearly a millennium of tumult as the populous of various polities throughout West Africa and beyond spread into the region, often violently clashing with already emplaced communities. These processes consistently created political fragmentation, repeated imperial impacts from outside, and weak to nonexistent political power beyond the individual village community. However, such a characterization glosses over the very real local political stakes at work in any given time. This talk explores how the Bandafassi Regional Archaeological Project (BRAP) has started to unravel the ways in which local power structures and residential units navigated such moments. It also describes future plans for analyzing how French colonialism became entangled in local political economies. Ultimately, the goal of BRAP is move beyond the characterization of Bandafassi in terms of what it lacked or how it was acted upon from the outside, to a place with a fully developed political and cultural life, relevant to the lives of its present-day inhabitants.

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